

ILHIE

Consumer Education Toolkit

For Providers



Knowledge is power...



ILHIE

ILLINOIS HEALTH
INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Knowledge is power

Those that know, do. Those that understand, teach.

Welcome Health IT Provider

Over the past 20 years, our nation has experienced a major change due to computers and information technology (IT). For instance, today, we have electronic access to banks, restaurants and the ability to shop online.

Until now, few have used this technology in healthcare. Relationships with doctors, pharmacies, hospitals, and other care organizations can now benefit from this big change some call **health IT**, the electronic health record (EHR), and the Personal Health Record (PHR).

The Illinois Health Information Exchange (ILHIE) Consumer Education Toolkit was developed with input and guidance from the ILHIE Consumer Education Work Group and the ILHIE Advisory Committee consisting of leaders in health IT. It was developed to provide healthcare professionals with simple, informative materials to share with their patients to better understand health IT, empower them to connect electronically and to be more proactive with their health.

Providers can use the materials as is or revise the materials in any way they choose. Please feel free to revise, re-write and/or re-brand the materials for your organization or purposes. The Toolkit is available in both English and Spanish.

Ways to leverage the Toolkit:

- Send out an e-blast to your organization's providers and/or consumers linking to the Toolkit
- Post the Toolkit and videos on your organization's website
- Include health IT information and a link to the Toolkit in your newsletter
- Include information about health IT in provider and consumer education programs

For more information, visit www.ilhie.org and search under the Consumer or Provider tab.

Your enthusiasm is contagious. Be a carrier.



ILHIE Consumer Education Toolkit

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Health information technology or health IT can be very confusing. We hope the most often asked questions document will help you to better understand how health IT will assist you and your doctors to make better decisions about your health.

2) Health IT Makes Health Care Easier

Health information technology (health IT) can help free you from the hassles of the health care system and make your communications with your doctors easier.

3) Information Technology in Health Care; The Next Consumer Revolution

Learn about the history of the Health Information Technology movement in America and how it can make your health care safer and much more convenient.

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Learn how having more complete medical records, securely stored and then shared between you and your doctors, can lead to better health care.

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Learn how Federal laws require that health insurance companies and most health care providers that handle your health information have policies, practices and safeguards in place protecting that information.

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Materials for Both Consumers and Health Care Providers:

6) Health IT True Stories

Read the true stories of how health IT has helped (or could have helped) many different people including providers and consumers.

7) “Health IT for You” Video

View this video and learn more about the benefits of health IT and how online, secure access to your health records can help ensure that you and your families get the best possible care. [“Health IT For You” - ONC YouTube Video.](#)

8) EHR’s: “How They Connect You and Your Doctors” Graphic

View this graphic and learn about many benefits for you and your doctor when you can share your medical records more effectively and quickly with other doctors. For example, you can eliminate the time and hassle of retaking multiple tests and medical exams. [“EHRs: How They Connect You and Your Doctors” - ONC Graphic.](#)

9) Health IT General Information Flyer

Review the attached document to learn more about what health exchange means for Patients and health care providers. [ILHIE General Health IT Flyer - For Providers, Patients and Policymakers \(pdf\).](#)

Materials for Health Care Providers:

10) Talking to Your Patients About Electronic Health Records

As a health care provider, you are likely seeing the direct impact of health IT in your practice. It is most important to share that information with your patients especially when they ask you about it.

11) For Providers; Patient Participation in Health IT

If you are a health care provider, learn more about educating your patients about electronic health information exchange and how it benefits both patients and providers.

Frequently Asked Questions For Consumers and Patients

Health information technology or health IT can be confusing for some people. We hope the most often asked questions below help you to better understand health IT, the benefits of health IT and what is taking place in Illinois and around the entire country

What is Health IT? (Health Information Technology)

Today, most health care providers write your medical information on paper charts which are not easily available in file cabinets and are hard to share with your other providers when needed, such as during an emergency. Health IT lets your health care providers use computers to store and securely exchange your health records.

Every state, including Illinois, is moving forward with health IT to improve patient health and lower the cost of health care. Health IT will allow you to use a computer or smart phone to contact your doctor to learn about and share information about your health. Health IT is all about empowering you to improve your health.

What Does Health IT Mean for Me?

- Improve the quality of your healthcare
- Help doctors to better treat your health
- Make health care safer
- Control the cost of health care
- Better track disease outbreaks
- Increase high quality health care services in underserved communities

What are Electronic Health Records (EHR's)?

An Electronic Health Record is a secure electronic version of your medical history including much of the same information currently in your doctor's paper files such as your medications, allergies, lab test results, age, weight, and billing information.

What are the Benefits of Health IT?

- Health IT makes you the most important member of your health care team. It gives you control over your own health information and lets you play a bigger role in your overall health.
- You get better and safer care when all your health care providers have a complete picture of your medical history.

- Health information that could save your life is quickly available in an emergency instead of paper records filed in many locations
- You will not need to complete as many forms every time you visit another doctor
- Your medical information is stored in a safe and secure system and can only be seen by your doctor, with your permission
- You don't have to take the same medical tests over again.
- Health IT lowers the cost of health care

What is Health Information Exchange?

Health Information Exchange is when your doctor's office, specialists, hospitals, clinics and labs share your health records over a computer network.

Are my Health IT Records Private and Secure?

Federal law protects your health information on paper and in electronic files. Only your doctor or authorized healthcare professional can create, view, update or exchange your records. All electronic health records follow strict rules and are shared through a secure network between your doctor's offices, hospitals, emergency rooms or clinics etc.

What is Electronic Prescribing?

Electronic prescribing, or e-Prescribing, is when your doctor sends your prescription electronically through a secure network directly to your pharmacy. The pharmacy receives your prescription and can fill it right away.

What are the Patient Benefits of e-Prescribing?

- Keeps you safer. The program can immediately warn your doctor about possible allergies or dangerous drug interactions. Your doctor can also see a full list of all your medications.
- Your medications might be cheaper. When your doctor e-Prescribes, the program may suggest lower cost medications and screens for medications covered by your insurance.
- It's quick and convenient. You'll no longer need to drop prescriptions off at the pharmacy and wait while they are filled.
- Reduces possible errors made with unreadable handwritten prescriptions. An e-prescription is more easily read than a handwritten prescription.
- You control who has permission to access this secure information. E-prescribing complies with laws about who can view your prescription information.

Spread the word, and ask your doctor about health IT.

Health IT Makes Health Care Easier

Learn how health information technology (health IT) can help free you from the hassles of the health care system and make all your health care communications easier

Some examples include:

Faster and Safer Prescriptions

E-prescribing systems send your prescriptions directly to the pharmacy so your medicine can be ready for pickup when you arrive, saving you time. It can also reduce possible errors made by hard-to-read handwriting on a paper prescription.

Health Record Exchange

When a doctor adds medical notes or test results to your Electronic Health Record (EHR), that information is available to all the health care providers you have given permission to read your records. They now can see the most up-to-date information about your health. Some healthcare providers may also give you access to see your own health records on a computer or a smart phone.

Less Paperwork

You have probably answered the same questions about your medical history many times on many forms. When health care providers share your electronic health information, you won't need to do this as often anymore. They will already have that information before you get there.

Fewer Medical Tests

Doctors sometimes order tests that you've had before because they don't have easy access to the results. If all your medical test results are in your electronic records, your doctor can see those results and only order the tests you need, saving you time and money.

Health Care Reminders

Many electronic health records (EHR's) have reminder systems for both you and your doctor. For example, some EHR's remind your doctor to follow up with you or to offer you information you may need. At the same time, some EHR's can send you email or text message reminders about your doctor appointments or immunizations etc. to improve your health.

Access to Information

In case of a natural disaster like a tornado, having your records available electronically should make it easier to access your medical records, and to make them available to providers away from home if you need to move temporarily or permanently. Click here to learn more about the [security of your health information](#).

Spread the word, and ask your doctor about health IT.

Information Technology in Health Care The Next Consumer Revolution

Learn about the history of the health information technology movement in America and how it can make your health care safer and simpler

Over the past 20 years, our nation has experienced a major change due to information technology (IT). Today, we have access to information and services to help us communicate with the organizations that are part of our daily lives such as: banks, utilities, government offices and entertainment companies.

Until now, few have had the opportunity to use this kind of technology related to their health. Relationships with your doctors, your pharmacy, your hospital, and other organizations are now about to benefit from the next big change in information technology: health IT.

Although it will take years for health care to realize all these improvements and fully address any pitfalls, the first changes in this transformation are already underway. At the same time, [numerous technology tools](#) are becoming available to improve health for you, your family, and your community.

Most consumers will first encounter the benefits of health IT through an electronic health record, or EHR, at their doctor's office or at a hospital.

Benefits of Health IT for You and Your Family

On a basic level, an Electronic Health Record (EHR) provides an electronic version of the "paper chart" you see doctors and nurses using. But when an EHR is connected to all of your health care providers (and often, to you as a patient), it can offer so much more:

- **EHRs reduce your paperwork.** The clipboard and new patient questionnaire may remain a feature of your doctor's office for some time to come. But as more information gets added to your EHR, your doctor and hospital will have more of that data available before you arrive. This means fewer and shorter forms for you to complete, lowering the "hassle factor."
- **EHRs get your information accurately into the hands of people who need it.** Coordinating information among doctors can be a difficult task, and one that can lead to medical mistakes if done incorrectly. When all of your doctors can share your health information via EHRs, each of them has access to better, up-to-date information about your care. That helps your doctors to make the best decisions, especially in a crisis.
- **EHRs help your doctors coordinate your care and keep you safer.** If you see three specialists in addition to your regular doctor, each of them may prescribe different drugs, and sometimes, these drugs may interact in dangerous ways. EHRs can warn your doctors if they try to prescribe a drug that could cause that kind of interaction. An EHR may also tell one of your doctors if a drug did not perform for you as expected, saving you from the risks and costs.

- **EHRs help reduce costs by avoiding tests you don't need.** Have you ever had to repeat medical tests because the results weren't available to another doctor? Repeating tests—whether a \$20 blood test or a \$2,000 MRI—results in higher costs to you in the form of bigger bills and insurance premiums. With EHRs, all of your doctors can have access to all your test results and records at once this should help reduce the chance for repeating tests.
- **EHRs give you direct access to your health records.** You already have a Federally guaranteed right to see your health records, identify wrong and missing information, and make additions or corrections. Some health care providers with EHR systems give their patients direct access to their health information online [in ways that help preserve privacy and security](#). This access allows you to keep better track of your care, and in some cases, answer your questions right away rather than waiting for a returned phone call. This access may also allow you to communicate directly and securely with your doctors.

Spread the word, and ask your doctor about health IT.

Health Information Exchange (HIE) and Health Care Quality

Learn how better information securely stored and shared between patients and doctors can lead to better health care

Usually, your primary doctor has stored your paper medical records, including lab results, tests, and records sent from other doctors. But sometimes — when you change doctors, and when doctors have out-of-date information — this system can break down. Health information technology (health IT) offers a better way for managing your records.

Consider all the different types of information that are in your medical record and all the different places that information can come from:

- Your medical history, diagnoses, medications, and allergies, from current and past doctors, emergency rooms and even school clinics
- Laboratory results from office labs, hospital labs, and independent labs
- X-rays, from a doctor's office, radiology offices, hospital radiology departments, and independent imaging centers

A Single Source

The promise of [electronic health records](#) (EHRs) and [personal health records](#) (PHRs) is a single complete record that includes all of this information: a record that is up to date, accurate, and in the hands of your doctor or you and your family when it's needed. That makes all of your doctors more knowledgeable about you and better able to make decisions with you about your health.

The main goal of health IT is to **improve your quality of care**. For instance, a study of Texas hospitals found that those with [more advanced health IT showed fewer deaths and fewer problems with care](#) (also called complications) among their patients compared with patients at hospitals with less advanced health IT.

EHRs can improve medical care by reminding your doctor **about the timing of preventive services** for your well-being or about specific issues related to managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and asthma. For example, a [study by Better Health Greater Cleveland \[PDF - 310 KB\]](#) found that at facilities using EHRs, 51% of patients with diabetes received all the recommended care for their condition, compared with 7% at facilities using paper-only records.

Much like the EHR, the Personal Health Record (PHR) can also be an electronic storage “hub” for all your most important health information. It's possible for you to create your own PHR using consumer-friendly software and online services and use it to improve your own health. Your PHR is all about you; you decide whether to create one in the first place, and if so, what to put in it.

Spread the word, and ask your doctor about health IT.

Protecting Your Privacy and Security

Learn how Federal laws require that health insurance companies and most health care providers that handle your health information have policies, practices and safeguards in place to protect your information

Protecting the Privacy and Security of Your Health Information

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy, Security and Breach Notification Rules are the primary Federal laws requiring such protections for your health information.

- The HIPAA Privacy Rule outlines the rights you have over your own health information, whether it is in electronic or paper format, held by covered entities. The rule sets limits on how your information can be used and shared.
- The HIPAA Security Rule requires that administrative, technical and physical safeguards are in place to keep your health information secure when it is in an electronic format.
- The Breach Notification Rule requires that you are notified if your health information, whether electronic or on paper, held by a covered entity such as a healthcare provider or health insurer or their business associates is seen by or made accessible to someone who is not authorized to access it. This requirement helps patients know if something has gone wrong with the protection of their information.

Who Must Follow These Rules

Most health care providers (such as doctors and hospitals) and health insurers must follow these rules. It is important to remember that not everyone is covered by these rules. For example life insurers, employers and many schools do not have to follow these rules.

What Information Is Protected

The health information protected by these rules includes any information held by a covered entity that relates to your health, or to the healthcare you have received and that could be used to identify you. Thus, most of your health information is protected by these rules, for example:

- Information your doctors, nurses, and other health care providers put in your medical record.
- Conversations your doctor has about your care or treatment with nurses and others.
- Information about you in your health insurer's computer system.
- Billing information about you at your clinic.

Other Laws

You may have additional protections and health information rights under your State's laws. There are also Federal laws that protect specific types of health information, such as information related to federally funded alcohol and substance abuse treatment.

Your Privacy Rights

You have important privacy rights under the HIPAA Privacy Rule, including:

- The right to see and get a copy of your health records, and to ask for corrections if the information is wrong
- The right to get a report on when and why your health information was used
- The right to ask to be reached somewhere other than at home, for example if being contacted at home would put you in danger
- The right to ask that your information NOT be shared

The HIPAA Privacy Rule allows certain health care providers and health insurers to use and share your information without your permission for such key purposes as treatment, payment and health care operations. However, for many other purposes, for example sales calls or advertising, your authorization is required. If you think your rights are being denied, or your health information isn't being protected, you have the right to file a complaint with your provider or health insurer. The privacy notice you receive from your provider or health insurer will tell you who to contact and how to file a complaint. You can also file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights.

Safeguards to Protect Your Health Information

The Security Rule requires that your electronic health information is kept secure with administrative, technical, and physical safeguards. These safeguards are designed to make sure that only the right people have access to your information.

The healthcare providers and healthcare insurers that have to follow the law must:

- Put in place safeguards to protect your health information, such as technical safeguards like requiring passwords and encrypting information.
- Have agreements in place with anyone with whom they share health information (also known as a business associate) to make sure that they only use and share your health information according to the law.
- Have procedures in place to limit who can access your health information.
- Train employees about how to protect your health information.

More Information

The Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has more information about your privacy rights at: <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/>.

Be Responsible

While Federal law can protect your health information, you should also use common sense to make sure that private information doesn't become public. If you access your health records online, make sure you use a strong password and keep it secret. Keep in mind that if you post information online in a public forum, you cannot assume it's private or secure

Spread the word, and ask your doctor about health IT.

Health IT True Stories

Read the true stories of how health IT tools helped (or could have helped) these Illinois residents

Danny from Chicago

E-Prescribing and Email Communications with Physician - Convenience

Recently at a doctor's appointment I was surprised to see my doctor send my prescription directly to my pharmacist. I asked my doctor whether I would have to bring a paper prescription to the pharmacy. I was a happy to learn that I wouldn't have to bring the written prescription and happier when my prescription was waiting for me when I went to pick it up!

Also, I am now able to email my doctor about health questions I have. He now prescribes medications for me and gives me other medical advice without having to go in for an office visit for everything. It saves me time and money and lets him have open appointments to take care of his sicker patients in person.

Diego from Berwyn

E-Prescribing - Safety

My mom's doctor has been very reluctant to change her workflow to accommodate the electronic ordering of maintenance prescriptions. Even though most Drug Benefit companies recommend fax transmission of prescription forms from the doctor's office, some doctors are still delegating that responsibility to patients and continue to provide handwritten prescriptions. The filing of these prescriptions via regular mail not only delays the turn-around on the order, but can also be a factor in the treatment process, if patients forget or choose not to place the prescription order. E-prescribing and electronic filing of orders would definitely help to alleviate those concerns.

Mary from Spring Valley

Duplicate Testing - Safety and Convenience

My elderly parents are snowbirds and escape to Arizona for the winter. My father is a cardiology patient and went for multiple tests while in Arizona just prior to his return to Spring Valley. All of his test records were to be faxed to Chicago so his specialist would have those results to review. Anxious about his condition, we made an appointment to meet with his specialist. The records were never faxed to the specialist in Chicago.

The outcome of this situation was my father had to retake all the same tests again in Chicago causing him and the family increased anxiety, wasted time, delayed treatment outcomes and double billing Medicare for the same tests twice.

Had his healthcare providers had an EHR, all this could have been avoided with a simple email exchanging his updated medical records and test results.

Krysta from Chicago
Immunization Records - Convenience

My husband and I decided to go to Thailand for our honeymoon. Friends and family recommended that we visit a travel immunization clinic a few months prior to our departure. My primary care physicians' office offered travel immunizations onsite but required me to provide them with a copy of my immunization record to determine which vaccinations I needed a full dose of and which I only needed a booster.

Because I had seen several physicians in two states over the last 10 years I had to contact several different offices to request my records. In some instances requesting records was relatively easy, in others it required faxing various forms multiple times and in one instance physically picking up documents from the medical records department. All of these steps resulted in a lag of several weeks before I was able to provide my physicians with the records, and consequently delayed the administration the vaccines and possibly impacted their effectiveness. In addition, I was not positive that what I provided my physician was a complete record.

Stasia, Physician from Carol Stream
Patient Engagement

Since opening a new practice 6 months ago, we have successfully implemented the patient portal. In the previous practice a patient portal was too costly for us to implement. However, our current EMR (electronic medical record) vendor offered the patient portal for free. We made it a point to quickly get up to speed on the various features offered through the patient portal. On the intake form, patients can also select their preferred method of communication. The options are text messages, phone calls, and notification via the patient portal.

The patient portal allows patients to access their clinical data online. Our practice promotes e-consultations to patients we believe would benefit from the service. During office visits, we tell patients what information they should provide if they decide to use e-consultations. Patients are encouraged to share their glucose levels and blood pressure readings. Patients who receive adjustments in their medications such as antidepressants and anxiety medications are also encouraged to share their responses.

Our experience suggests that today's patients are ripe for engagement. Since implementing our EMR six months ago, approximately 60% of patients have signed up for the patient portal. We have received appointment requests, prescription refill requests, as well as e-mails regarding symptoms and treatment. During office visits, a number of patients have shared their appreciation of being able to view test results online.

We have had success with patient engagement by implementing the software tools available and promoting the portal to our patients.

Todd from Chicago
Lost Records in a Disaster Situation - Safety

I lived in New Orleans my entire life until Katrina. I moved to Chicago where I had family after the disaster. I cannot retrieve any of my past medical records as all my paper records are destroyed. As someone living with a chronic illness there is no record of my past treatment regimens other than what I can remember. It's like starting over.

Jennifer from Springfield

Medical Tests – Safety

Jennifer, a young mother with a one-year old son, learned the value of the electronic health records available to all her doctors when she visited her dermatologist last year.

When the doctor found a mole that should be removed under a local anesthetic, he took a close look at Jennifer's records before the procedure. Since he had access to Jennifer's history, he knew she was pregnant without even asking.

Before he started the removal, the dermatologist checked with Jennifer's obstetrician to make sure using a local was OK.

The question could be asked and answered quickly and easily, the dermatologist went ahead with the procedure, and Jennifer was fine.

Patricia from Chicago

Test Results – Convenience

Instead of an endless chain of phone calls, Patricia's primary care physician informed her of the results of her tests quickly and easily with secure email. Here are the messages that Patricia's doctor sent to her.

pat - your urine was normal dr n
Mon 8/20 12:14 PM

pat - your stool was negative for blood dr n
Mon 8/20 12:10

pat - your labs look ok your b12 is low (from decrease in dietary intake-- take supplement) your cholesterol is high (we discussed) lets recheck in 6 months. dr nanc
Mon 8/20 11:28

Patricia had peace of mind, less hassle, and a clear understanding of what she would discuss with the doctor during her next appointment.

Spread the word, and ask your doctor about health IT.

Talking to Your Patients About Electronic Health Records

As a health care provider, you are likely seeing the direct impact of health IT in your practice. It is important that you educate your patients about how these changes will impact them and know how to answer their questions when they ask about it.

Like you, medical providers across the nation are using electronic health records (EHRs) to increase the quality, safety, and efficiency of health care. Research suggests, however, that patients have a limited understanding of EHRs. As a provider, it is important for you to engage your patients in a conversation and answer their questions about health information technology and about EHRs in particular. Below are some questions you might receive from your patients as well as suggestions on how you might answer them.

What Is an Electronic Health Record?

An electronic health record is not just a computerized version of your paper chart. It's a digital record of your health information that can provide your care team with comprehensive health information about you. Over time, it can allow your providers to share important information, across different health care settings, in accordance with Federal and state privacy and security requirements.

This is one of the key features of an EHR: It is designed to allow appropriate information sharing beyond the health care provider who first collects the information. It is built to share information with other providers, such as labs and specialists. It can contain information from all the providers involved in your care in a practice setting, or it can link through secure information networks to information held in other providers' EHR systems. And, as health information exchange capabilities advance further, the information can move with you—to the specialist, the hospital, the nursing home, the next state, or even across the country.

What Information Does an Electronic Health Record Contain?

An EHR includes information about your health, such as:

- Medical history
- Diagnoses
- Medications
- Immunization dates
- Allergies
- Radiology images
- Lab and test results

How Can an Electronic Health Record Help Me?

Storing health information in an EHR has potential benefits for you as well as for your health care providers. Benefits to you include:

- **Better Care**
With an EHR, all of your health information can be in one place. A networked EHR system can give providers more accurate and complete information about your health, so you receive the best possible care.

- **Better Care Coordination**

Having information in electronic form means that it can be shared easily with the people who ensure that you are receiving the care you need. Because providers have the ability to share information with other providers involved in your care, the care you and your family receive is better coordinated.

- **More Involvement in Your Care**

You can fully take part in decisions about your health and those that you are caring for. By making all your health care providers aware that you have an EHR, they will be able to securely share information with you electronically, for example, through a personal health record.

- **How Is my Health Information Protected?**

Privacy and security safeguards are in place to protect your personal health information. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule, a federal law, requires your health care providers to give you a Notice of Privacy Practices to inform you how your information may be used and shared, as well as how you can exercise your rights under the HIPAA Privacy Rule. The same privacy rules that protect your paper records also protect your EHR.

Additionally, the HIPAA Security Rule, also a federal law, gives you rights over your health information and sets rules and limits on who can look at and receive your health information. Standards include access controls, like tracking who can access your health information and password protections. With EHRs, in fact, there are additional security features like passwords and digital fingerprints to safeguard your information. There may be additional privacy laws in place for a variety of areas such as mental health, substance usage, HIV/AIDS and genetic testing. You may want to ask your doctor for more details about this.

For Providers

Patient Participation in Health IT

If you are a health care provider, learn more about educating your patients about electronic health exchange and how it benefits both patients and providers

Providers and patients who share access to electronic health information can collaborate in informed decision making. Patient participation is especially important in managing and treating chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and obesity.

How EHRs Foster Patient Participation

Electronic health records (EHRs) can help providers:

- **Ensure high-quality care.** With EHRs, providers can give patients full and accurate information about all of their medical evaluations. Providers can also offer follow-up information after an office visit or a hospital stay, such as self-care instructions, reminders for other follow-up care, and links to web resources.
- **Create an avenue for communication with their patients.** With EHRs, providers can manage appointment schedules electronically and exchange e-mail with their patients. Quick and easy communication between patients and providers may help providers identify symptoms earlier. And it can position providers to be more proactive by reaching out to patients.

Personal Health Records

A personal health record, or PHR, is an electronic application used by patients to maintain and manage their own health information (or that of others for whom they are authorized to do so). A PHR differs from an EHR in that patients themselves usually set up and access the PHR. Patients can use a PHR to keep track of information from doctor visits, record other health-related information, and link to health-related resources.

PHRs can increase patient participation in their own care. They can also help families become more engaged in the health care of family members.

- With **stand alone PHRs**, patients fill in the information from their own records and memories, and the information is stored on patients' computers or the Internet. Many companies offer these services and can be found on the Internet.
- **Tethered or connected PHRs** are linked to a specific health care organization's EHR system or to a health plan's information system. The patient accesses the information through a secure portal.

With tethered/connected PHRs, patients can log on to their own records and see, for example, the trend of their lab results over the last year. That kind of information can motivate patients to take medications and keep up with lifestyle changes that have improved their health.

Ideally, patients will be able to link their PHRs with their doctors' EHRs, creating their own health care "hubs." Most doctors are not ready for that kind of change quite yet, but it is a worthy goal.

The Patient's Perspective

Information technology is at the heart of modern life. It touches different people in different ways. Some are comfortable with new technologies; others may be intimidated at first. As patients become familiar with health IT, a greater level of comfort is achieved. Health IT developments tend to make many patients more active participants in their own health care. As providers adopt new technologies such as EHRs, it's important to keep the patient's perspective in mind.